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ABSTRACT

Reported in five tables, with interpretations, were results of a survey in Alaska to ascertain special education (SE) priorities for program planning. Of 921 survey forms sent by the State Department of Education to all SE teachers and administrators, district administrators, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) teachers and aides, and to 200 regular class teachers, 624 were completed. Ten program areas, arranged to minimize bias due to list placement, required priority ranking. Results showed that highest mean ranking was given to regular class support programs; that second and third mean rankings were given to primary level integrated programs for mildly handicapped children by all but two groups; and that second mean ranking was given by administrators to identification and prescriptive programs, and by BIA teachers in remote areas to rural support programs. Also, BIA teachers and administrators gave third and fourth mean ranking to primary support and learning disability programs at all levels. Preschool identification programs received a mean ranking of fifth by all groups; and gifted and secondary vocational programs, and instructional materials centers were low in priority. (MC)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PRIORITIES OF ALASKAN EDUCATORS

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PRIORITIES OF ALASKAN EDUCATORS

Regular class support programs were considered by all groups of state educators surveyed, to be the most important special education service. Over 900 surveys were mailed to all special education teachers and administrators, all district administrators, all B.I.A. teachers and aides, and a randomly chosen sample of 200 regular class elementary teachers, out of a total of 2208 in the state. More than two-thirds responded to the survey. Primary level integrated programs for mildly handicapped pupils and learning disabilities programs at all levels were considered of next importance by most respondents. The findings indicate strong support of integrated noncategorical programming for exceptional students.

Program areas were arranged on the form in three different ways to minimize bias due to placement on the list. The form used is given in Table 1; Table 2 summarizes the number of surveys mailed out and returned.

TABLE 1

SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The State Department of Education has responsibility for making many decisions that affect special education in Alaska. To help organize our activities, plan programs for next year, and make decisions on grant applications and funding, we need to set priorities. It would help if we knew what focus seemed most important to you. Areas of possible focus would include those listed below. Please rank them 1) for first priority, 2) for second priority, and so on. "Ties" will invalidate the instrument, so please rank them from 1 to 10. A stamped addressed envelope is enclosed; please return the ranking this week as your help is needed now. Any comments or suggestions you make will be appreciated. Thank you for your assistance in planning.

_____ SUPPORT SERVICES initiated and/or expanded, such as counseling, school psychology, etc.

_____ SECONDARY VOCATIONAL programs for handicapped students

_____ INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CENTERS

_____ RURAL support to help children in isolated areas who have learning deficits

_____ PRESCHOOL efforts to identify and help handicapped three- and four-year olds

_____ PRIMARY LEVEL early elementary integrated support programs for mildly handicapped pupils

_____ GIFTED program development

_____ LEARNING DISABILITIES programs at all levels

_____ IDENTIFICATION and prescriptive programs across the state

_____ REGULAR CLASSROOM support programs, to help teachers and administrators meet needs of handicapped children in regular classrooms

COMMENTS:

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF SURVEY FORMS MAILED AND RETURNED

Group Surveyed	Number of Surveys Mailed	Number of Surveys Returned
All Special Education teachers in the state	211	160
All Special Education and District Administrators	57	40
A randomly-selected sample of 200 regular elementary teachers, out of a total of 2,208	200	122
All Elementary Building Principals	169	126
All BIA elementary teachers and aides	324	176
TOTAL	921	624

SURVEY RESULTS

All groups surveyed gave highest mean ranking to regular class support programs. Primary level integrated programs for mildly handicapped children, and learning disabilities programs at all levels were ranked second and third by all but two groups. Administrators gave second mean ranking to identification procedures. BIA teachers and aides, working in remote areas, gave second mean ranking to rural support programs. Both administrators and BIA teachers gave third and fourth ranking to primary support programs and learning disabilities programs at all levels. Preschool programs were generally ranked about fifth by all groups, and programs for gifted were generally ranked lowest.

The mean priority rankings of the groups surveyed are given in Table 3, and mean rankings of all groups by category are indicated in Table 4, Table 5 lists priorities of groups in rank order.

The survey form included a request for open-ended comments or suggestions. The following are some comments by respondents:

* At the present time our greatest need is a census of children needing special education, whether they are handicapped or gifted.

* We seem to be educating toward mediocrity; we sincerely need programs that encourage the gifted to their fullest potential.

* The gifted are our greatest resource, but they are being given no help. A gifted child can be easily discouraged if not motivated. In the village many gifted people become drunks because they can probably see how far below capacity they are working.

* I feel that more programs are needed to acquaint the gifted student with the gussak (white) culture so that he may learn to be at ease in that culture and work better for his own people by using the methods of the dominant culture.

* The school where I am working seems to spend all its time and teaching efforts on the slow learner. The normal or gifted is forgotten or given busy work.

* Lack of immediately available materials for more able students in the upper grades to carry on individual projects is a personal problem. Outside of my *Time* magazines, there is little immediate current material to research contemporary events and ideas.

* Most special education work I have seen in Alaska has been merely remedial work with the children, the only difference being a change of publisher's texts from those the child uses in the regular classroom.

* Out here in the bush, our greatest need is for more individualized and programmed materials not only in reading but in math and perhaps in social studies as well. Almost all of our kids have "learning disabilities" of some sort.

* There should be programs designed to work with children once they have been identified and tested as having certain problems. Too often it seems that children in remote areas are tested, a difficulty is noted, but nothing is ever done.

* Failure syndrome begins in the early elementary years due to language and culture differences, and procedures special education cases that fall in "normal" IQ range. Early assistance to produce success would be invaluable.

* There must be better programs. We have far too many specialists and they are not effective.

TABLE 3

MEAN RANKINGS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM PRIORITIES BY ALASKAN EDUCATORS

	Secondary Vocational	Primary	Learning Disabilities	IMCs	Gifted Programs	Rural Support	Identification	Preschool Handicapped	Regular Class Support	Support Services
Special Education Teachers	5.2	4.5	4.4	7.3	7.2	6.3	5.4	4.8	4.1	5.9
Special Education and District Administrators	6.4	4.5	5.1	6.6	6.9	5.6	3.9	5.9	3.4	6.7
Regular Class Elementary Teachers	7.0	4.3	4.1	6.0	6.2	6.0	6.1	5.7	3.7	5.8
Elementary Building Principals	6.3	4.5	4.0	6.5	6.3	6.2	5.9	5.9	3.4	6.0
BIA Elementary Teachers and Aides	6.5	4.3	4.5	6.4	6.7	4.0	6.6	5.4	3.7	6.7

TABLE 4

MEAN RANKINGS OF MAJOR GROUPS IN ORDER

	Special Education Teachers	Special Ed. & District Administrators	Regular Class Elementary Teachers	Elementary Building Principals	BIA Elementary Teachers & Aides
1					
2					
3		Reg. Class Identification	Reg. Class	Reg. Class	Reg. Class
4	Reg. Class Learn. Dis. Primary Preschool	Primary	Learn. Dis. Primary	Learn. Dis. Primary	Rural Primary Learn. Dis.
5	Sec. Voc. Identification Support Ser.	Learn. Dis. Rural Preschool	Preschool Support Ser.	Preschool– Identification	Preschool
6	Rural	Sec. Voc. IMCs Support Ser. Gifted	Rural IMCs Identification Gifted	Support Ser. Rural Gifted–Sec. IMCs	IMCs Sec. Voc. Identification Gifted–S.S.
7	Gifted IMCs		Sec. Voc.		
8					
9					

TABLE 5

MEAN RANKINGS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM PRIORITIES BY CATEGORIES